It is a lot of pressure to pick a good elf name.

When I was little, I never named my pets an average name like Spot or Rover. It was more like Peanut Brittle or Sir Hop-a-Lot. Today I needed to pick out a name for myself for the Secret Santa. It was stressing me out.

(I always seem to go last, which is just my luck.\_

My teacher, Miss Lee, finally called my name, Samantha.

I do not like the name Samantha. I like to be called Sam. When I open my mouth, my elf name does not come out the way I want it to. I want my elf name to be Flame. I think Flame is a good name because fire changes from orange to blue to smoke, without warning you.

I tell my teacher, I want my elf name to be “Sparkles”.

My teacher repeats the name. She probably repeated it because I spoke so softly.

Some of the boys laugh. They are the same boys that laughed when I told the class that I wanted them to call me Sam. My hair was really short, and the boys told me I looked like a boy. The boys called me Sam the Man.

I let my hair grow long. I stopped telling kids to call me Sam.

Miss Lee used to teach second grade, so some of her ideas were lame for our 6th grade class.

When it is my turn to pick, some notices that it is snowing. Snow is not rare in Pennsylvania, but we all run to the window to watch it snow.

Suddenly the classroom door opens, and the principal walks in. Miss Lee starts to explain that we are watching the first snow fall of the season.

Our principal is not thrilled. He tells us that its “just snow.”

A short person from behind the principal speaks. She says, “I am from California. I think snow is awesome.” The girl is not wearing a uniform like the rest of us.

Miss Lee tells the new girl that they are picking their Secret Santas. The gift has to be under five dollars.

The new girl picks the name Blade. When the boys start telling jokes, the new girl stares at the boys and they are suddenly quiet.

The new girl is wearing military boots. She is so different from the other kids.

It is my turn to pick. I reach down and pull out a name. It says, “Blade.”

At lunch kids said that the new girl has a collection of knives. They said that she has a pet snake. Some kids say that the new girl and her family are weird.

I am sitting with Henry. Everyone calls us weird. I tell Henry that I like her boots. Henry hears me, which is the first time because I always talk softly.

Henry tells me that he wants to still be my best friend. I tell him he is more like a pet then a best friend. We both laugh.

After school, I go to the mall with my mother. It is like a zoo without cages. I have to pick out a present for my aunt and Blade. My mother shows me stuff, and I say “Maybe.” But mom tells me to speak up. I said, “Maybe” but this time a little louder.

Mom is wearing high heels. She looks pretty but uncomfortable. I would rather be comfortable and plain. I would buzz my hair if she would let me.

Mom is ready to buy make-up for Blade, when her phone rings. It is her boyfriend. Mom gives the cashier a credit card. I buy the make up and laces with skulls on it.

Mom does not know that I bought the shoelaces.

On my way to school, I see a dirty white jeep in front of the school. Blade gets out of the jeep! I put the window down, and stick my head out the window and say “Hi.”

People on the bus yell at me to close the window because it is cold.

Blade waves back to me, and says, “Hi.”

Miss Lee greets us at the door. She looks sad. She tells the kids that there is an issue with Secret Santa. She told us that she broke a rule. Teachers are not supposed to talk about Santa. Miss Lee said, “Not everyone celebrates Christmas.” We have to now call our event, “Secret Sharers.”

Blade suddenly asks, “What is the bad news?”

Miss Lee is surprised. “That was the bad news.”

The kids are still happy because they still get to give and get one present.

Miss Lee tells the students that they must be like a ninja and secretly deliver their present.

One of the students asks, “Aren’t we going to deliver our gifts like an elf?”

Miss Lee reminds the class, that they have to change some of the words, so that people are not offended.

When I get home, there is more bad news. Mom left a note that said, “CALL ME WHEN YOU GET HOME.” The note was placed on the shoelaces.

Mom explains, “I don’t mind buying the laces, but you did not ask.”

I told her, “You were busy on the phone when Scott called, and I did not want to bother you.”

I can tell that mom is busy at her real estate office. I can hear her typing on the computer.

Scott thinks that I am a good artist. When I get done with the phone call with mom, I take out my art books.

I text Henry and invite him over to the house. He gets cupcake frosting on a piece of paper, and I turn it into an amazing snowman.

I tell Henry that I am Blades Secret Santa. I make a card for Blade, but don’t sign it. Then I make it into an origami rabbit.

Two kids from my class ask me to help them deliver their presents which makes me feel good. They tell me that I am “Secretive.”

When I am delivering one of the presents Blade sees me. I tell her that I am not Abby’s Santa.

She reminds me that Secret Santa’s are outlawed at the school, and that they were ninjas. Then she called me Sparkles.

I ask Blade if she has snakes, and my voice echoes in the hallway. Blade turns to me and says, “If snakes is the worse thing they’re saying about me, that’s pretty good.”

I tell her that I have a rabbit and ferret.

She gives me a thumbs up and walks to class.

At night I have trouble sleeping. I remember that when I was talking to Blade, that her lips turned different colors. Maybe she did wear makeup.

I decide to unwrap the present and give her the makeup instead.

I decide that I will deliver Blade’s present today. She is not in the room. I worry that some of the boys will tell. The girls all stick together. I feel like the new kid, even though Blade is here now.

I ask Miss Lee to be my ninja. When Blade gets a drink of water, Miss Lee puts the gift into her desk. Blade takes the origami rabbit and makes it hop on her desk. Then she opens it. Her forehead gets red.

She opens the present and holds the makeup like a scary snake.

When I reach into my desk to get paper, a present falls out of my desk. I open it. It is a pink purse with sparkles on it.

That’s when I decided that I needed to go to the nurse. I feel like I am going to cry. The nurse does not know what to do with me.

Mom is called. She comes to school. I was embarrassed. I had purchased the wrong gift for Blade. I didn’t get the right gift either.

Mom says, “You have had a tough couple of years, and are amazing to me.”

This makes me cry harder.

She continued, “Its your first Christmas with Daddy and me being divorces. You are still getting used to the apartment and school. Its been a lot for you and for me.”

Mom’s phone rings. As she reaches into her purse, I see the skull shoelaces.

I ask mom for the shoelaces. She thought that they were for me. I tell my mother, “I know how to make today better.” We always try to make a list of five things to make things better when we have a bad day.

Mom hands me the laces. At lunch Henry gets me a piece of paper.

I try to draw a tiger on the paper. I wrap the shoelaces in the paper. The drawing looks like Hobbes, a comic strip character.

After I ate my tater tots I decide I will walk right up to Blade and give her the present. This is against the Secret Santa rules.

I wait until gym is over. Blade is drinking water at the fountain. I hand her the present, and tell her it is my backup gift.

Blade tells me that she knew I was her Secret Sharer. She said that the origami and drawing was so good. Blade loves the shoelaces. She makes a bracelet with one of the shoelaces. Then she makes a bracelet with the other shoelace for me.

She tells me that we look like “twins.”

When Blade moves a speck of dandruff falls from her head like snow. I make a wish on it.

Just as Blade is ready to turn to go to class, she asks me my name. My lips open to tell her my name is Samantha, but I tell her my name is “Flame.”

One of the teachers in the hallway tells us to go to class. I call to Blade and tell her my name is Sam.

Blade does not tease me. She holds her wrist above her head and said, “Your secret’s safe with me, Sam.”

And as the teacher walks away, I say, “Sick” which really means good. And this time I am not whispering.

